

VZCZCXRO7933  
OO RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM  
DE RUEHML #0646/01 0830915  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 240915Z MAR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3622  
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 000646

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MTS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/25/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BEXP](#) [VA](#) [RP](#)  
SUBJECT: FOREIGN SECRETARY ON HUMAN RIGHTS, PEACE PROCESS,  
RED CROSS HOSTAGES

REF: A. MANILA 630 (RED CROSS HEAD CONCERNED FOR HOSTAGES)  
[1](#)B. MANILA 611 (ADM WILLARD VISIT STRENGTHENS TIES)  
[1](#)C. MANILA 563 (BRUTAL MURDER INVESTIGATED AS EJK)

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In a broadranging discussion March 24, the Ambassador urged Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Alberto Romulo to ensure the safety of two high-profile murder suspects if they are extradited from the U.S., and reiterated the need for continued improvement in Philippine human rights practices. Romulo stressed the Philippine government was committed to continuing to improve human rights and a "culture change" on human rights was at hand. The Foreign Secretary said that, contrary to media reports, former UK PM Tony Blair would not be actively involved in the Mindanao peace process, and lamented that negotiations for three International Red Cross workers kidnapped by the Abu Sayyaf Group in Mindanao were in disarray. END SUMMARY.

#### ASSURANCES ON HIGH-PROFILE EXTRADITION

-----

[1](#)2. (C) In a March 24 tour d'horizon with Department of Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romulo, the Ambassador emphasized the need for the Philippine government to respect the human rights of two former Philippine police officials implicated in a nine-year-old murder case and whose extraditions from the U.S. are still pending. The Ambassador noted our continuing bilateral law enforcement cooperation and reiterated the importance, given the many interests involved, of making sure that the two men will be treated in accordance with the very highest human rights standards upon their return to the Philippines. Stressing that the government wanted the extraditions to proceed quickly, Romulo assured the Ambassador that the human rights and safety of former police superintendents Glenn Dumlao and Cezar Mancao would be fully respected.

#### SEEKING TO IMPROVE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS

-----

[1](#)3. (C) Turning to human rights more generally, Romulo acknowledged that the Philippine government was committed to continuing to improve human rights standards and that a "culture change" in the government on perceptions of human rights was at hand, as illustrated by high-level statements uniformly condemning the recent murder of Rebelyn Pitao (Ref C), daughter of a terrorist New People's Army commander. Romulo said that the Philippine government wanted to do everything possible to investigate this killing. He thanked the Ambassador for the proactive U.S. role in working with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP). Still, Romulo admitted that the

Philippine government felt "picked on" for its human rights problems, which, he said, paled in comparison to problems in other Southeast Asia countries like Burma. The government appreciated the collaborative approach of U.S. human rights programs in the Philippines, which he felt were more effective than public criticism in achieving positive change.

14. (C) The Ambassador noted that she was personally meeting with human rights groups to hear their concerns and ideas. The U.S. holds the Philippines to higher human rights standards, the Ambassador said, because the Philippines is an open democracy with strong ties to the U.S. The U.S. demands more from the Philippines because, the Ambassador said, we know the Philippines is capable of achieving more.

#### RED CROSS KIDNAPPING "A MESS"

-----

15. (C) Turning to the three International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) hostages kidnapped in January by the terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in Sulu (Ref A), Romulo described the situation as a "mess" and lamented that Senator and Philippine Red Cross Chairman Richard Gordon's involvement in the matter was unhelpful. AFP Chief of Staff Yano, on the other hand, continued to show exemplary leadership skills "across the board." Romulo speculated that AFP Lt. Gen. Delfin Bangit, Chief of the AFP Southern Command, would be a good candidate to lead the AFP after Yano's retirement in June, but said that Bangit was not "a standout" leader like Yano.

MANILA 00000646 002 OF 002

#### TONY BLAIR AND PEACE PROCESS

-----

16. (C) Secretary Romulo described former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair's visit this week to the Philippines, acknowledging the usefulness of his positive messages on the Mindanao peace process. Despite widespread media reports that Blair would take an active part in the peace process, Romulo noted that Blair was not specifically asked to play a role in Mindanao because, as President Arroyo had indicated, the Malaysians were the official facilitator for the peace talks, and other third parties could not be brought into the process without their concurrence.

17. (C) Secretary Romulo noted that the Philippines continued to seek observer status at the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), and that at present only two countries objected to such status -- Morocco and Pakistan. Romulo indicated that he may travel to those countries soon to press for their support.

#### BURMA "IMPERIVOUS TO PRESSURE"

-----

18. (C) On Burma, Secretary Romulo expressed frustration at the lack of movement on addressing human rights issues there, and said that the Burmese appeared nearly impervious to outside pressure. He noted that Thailand had scheduled the series of ASEAN summits for the Easter holiday week -- not ideal for the Philippines, but the Philippine delegation would nonetheless take part in order to press for continued progress on key issues, including ASEAN's human rights mechanism.

#### ADMIRAL WILLARD'S VISIT

-----

19. (C) The Ambassador briefed Secretary Romulo on the recent visit of Pacific Fleet Commander Admiral Robert Willard (Ref B), whose meetings in the Philippines with AFP Chief of Staff Alexander Yano and Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro underscored the importance and the success of bilateral

cooperation on counterterrorism and other issues.

VETERANS' BENEFIT

¶10. (C) Touching on the recently inaugurated program to compensate WWII Filipino veterans who fought alongside U.S. troops, the Ambassador explained to Secretary Romulo that the Manila office the U.S. Veterans Administration hoped to release checks to Filipino veterans in late April or early May, and that all claimants would receive a letter indicating either approval or denial of their claims. The Ambassador noted that some claims would be denied, and that we could expect some negative press when that happened. Romulo voiced gratitude for the new benefit, and said he understood the situation.

KENNEY